
Through a Different Lens:

ActionAid's Resilience Framework

Version 1.0



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Through a Different Lens ActionAid's Resilience Framework

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Summary

Over the past few decades, it has become increasingly clear that conflicts and disasters are affecting the poorest and most vulnerable people in greatest numbers. They often face a complex array of threats, which need to be addressed by taking a holistic view and considering problems and their answers in relation to each other.

Resilience building offers a response to these increasingly complex realities. It widens the focus to include shocks and stresses such as natural resource degradation, epidemics, political oppression, violent conflict or economic crises. It promotes a rounded analysis of the issues, together with an integrated approach to dealing with them that includes and goes beyond the more conventional disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation approaches.

It is fair to say that resilience building remains a widely debated area of work, with many organisations and donors finding it challenging to operationalise. The new Sustainable Development Goals do however demonstrate the commitment of the international community as it recognises resilience as a key factor in ending poverty. Furthermore, the 2015 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction has set clear targets to encourage countries to invest in preparedness and mitigation.

Resilience thinking is increasingly becoming coupled with the principles of 'transformation', which emphasises the importance of power relations between for example, men and women, rich and poor, young and old. By challenging the status quo around dominant groups, resilience aims to fundamentally transform the unequal power structures that are keeping people vulnerable to shocks and stresses.

For ActionAid, it is essential that any such resilience building not only cuts across both development and humanitarian work, but that it also incorporates the principles of the human rights based approach (HRBA). ActionAid's HRBA is based around three main pillars: empowerment, solidarity and campaigning, all aimed at challenging the balance of power and helping people to influence those factors that are keeping them vulnerable. Women's rights and leadership are at the core.

When integrated with the HRBA, resilience offers an alternative to the conventional development and humanitarian paradigm by working towards strengthening the ability of individuals and communities to recognise, challenge and transform the power structures that dictate their vulnerability, meaning their ability to withstand shocks and stresses over the long term can be greatly improved.

ActionAid's resilience framework, set out in this paper, will help to design programmes that build the capacities of communities. It is solidly anchored in ActionAid's HRBA approach by identifying 'equal and just power' as the overarching aim of ActionAid's resilience work. It includes the different elements of resilience that are crucial areas of work in addressing the risks and vulnerabilities of disaster- or crisis-prone communities. It has been developed to help understand the vulnerabilities of communities to different risks, and the opportunities that can be derived from this.

With this, we hope the framework will open up opportunities for ActionAid country offices around the world to work closely with women, children and poor and marginalised groups to analyse their vulnerabilities to different shocks and stresses, take individual and collective action to address the direct and root causes of this, and with this ultimately shift the power dynamics that are keeping people vulnerable to the worst effects of conflict and disasters.

1. Context

Natural hazards, climate change, epidemics, population growth, unplanned rapid urbanisation, food and water insecurity, and protracted conflict may threaten hundreds of millions of people in the decades to come. As a result of this, there is no doubt the world will see both rapid and slow onset disasters and crises occurring more and more frequently over the coming years, and the expectation is that this trend will continue.

In 2014 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has stated that, if dramatic cuts in emissions are not taken urgently, global surface temperatures are likely to rise by an average of up to 4.8°C over pre-industrial levels during the 21st century. Likewise, we see that increasing incidences of intra-state conflicts, insurgencies, political violence, pervasive criminality and terrorism are continuing to result in the suffering of people all over the world. Conflicts and natural disasters are not the only issues. Pests and diseases that affect humans, livestock and crops continue to lead to loss of life, negatively impact on livelihoods, hinder economic progress, destroy infrastructure, degrade natural resources and trigger migration.

It is against this background that resilience has been introduced as a central concept in development and humanitarian policies, and many organisations, governments and donors are now applying the concept to their programmes. With the introduction of resilience, we see an increasing focus on supporting communities in their ability to anticipate, adapt, cope with and recover from hazards, the effects of climate change, armed conflict and other shocks and stresses.

This document aims to introduce ActionAid staff and all our partner organisations to ActionAid's approach to resilience building, and the core and cross-cutting elements that form ActionAid's resilience framework. We hope it will help to strengthen our resilience programming so we can support communities to thrive more effectively, despite the different shocks and stresses that they are experiencing.

This chapter will start with a brief explanation of the evolution of disaster risk thinking, which is followed by an explanation of the concept of resilience. Chapter two describes what makes people vulnerable to disaster risks. Chapter three explains ActionAid's human rights based approach (HRBA), its three core pillars of empowerment, solidarity and campaigning, and how this contributes to community resilience. Chapter four will present ActionAid's resilience framework. Chapter five concludes this paper.

1.1 Emerging policy and practice on disaster risks

Since the 1970s and 1980s, we have seen a gradually deeper understanding and recognition of why disasters happen. The concept of disaster risk reduction (DRR) – reducing the impact of hazards by reducing vulnerability and risk – originates from this understanding. DRR focuses on natural hazards of either a rapid onset nature such as earthquakes, landslides and cyclones or slow onset nature such as droughts, desertification and sea level rise. The term disaster risk management (DRM) is also regularly used to refer to the same area of work as DRR.

The international community started setting clear commitments and targets for DRR in 2005, when the Hyogo Framework for Action (2005-2015) was agreed. While this framework was mostly focused on disaster preparedness, its recently approved successor, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030), also underlines the urgency of building community resilience by helping mitigate shocks and stresses before, during and after disasters. The new framework also steps away from a narrow focus on natural disasters, and recognises climate changes as one of the drivers of disaster risk.

The new Sustainable Development Goals (2015-2030) also acknowledge resilience explicitly and implicitly in at least five proposed Goals. It is recognised as a key factor in achieving the first Goal to: “End poverty in all its forms everywhere”. It is also a core feature of Goal 13, which calls for “urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”.¹

BOX 1: Resilience, what's the buzz?

Resilience has been labelled as merely a new buzzword by some critics, as a concept that will soon go out of fashion. They point out that the idea has created more confusion than enlightenment, meaning different things to different people, and is at risk of becoming an empty phrase just like “sustainable development”. Although the concept certainly has its flaws, resilience thinking has rightfully gained in significance.

Resilience demands that all humanitarian and development actors ask the question: why are events such as floods, Ebola and conflicts having such devastating effects on certain people? This will naturally be followed by the question of what can be done to counter it. Answers will without a doubt point at different underlying causes to people's vulnerability. It will require NGOs and other actors to, for example, consider activities to help change the ways a community is being governed. This means the solution does not lie exclusively in the domain of DRR or climate change adaptation. It pushes NGOs and others to overcome compartmentalisation and see problems and solutions in relation to each other. It is about the realisation that different departments often work in the same area, towards the same goal, but apply different concepts and approaches, and use different sources of funding.

The concept encourages us to consider interventions across our programmes to better prepare and prevent disasters and conflicts impacting so greatly on poor people. It does mean that we need to be continuously aware of the links between different areas of work, consider how we can maximise our efforts to prepare communities for an increasingly unpredictable future, and coordinate our efforts accordingly.



1.2 Climate change adaptation

With scientific knowledge and evidence on climate change and its effects increasing over the last two decades, we have seen different climate change adaptation approaches emerging. These include work with smallholder farmers to support them in adapting their farming practices in the face of climate extremes, strengthening early warning systems, retrofitting of houses, and making non-farm livelihoods resilient to climate impacts.

ActionAid promotes the climate resilient sustainable agriculture approach (CRSA), which has much in common with agroecology. We support farmers in working with nature, increasing biodiversity, conserving water, enhancing soil cover and avoiding harmful agro-chemicals that can have adverse impacts on the environment and human health. In this way farmers can improve their resilience to climate extremes.²

These approaches also aim to address the longer-term impacts of climate change, such as changes in ecosystems, loss of biodiversity and climate-related diseases.



In India, ActionAid trains farmers on vermicompost which enriches the soil and can be used as a high grade natural, organic fertilizer.

PHOTO: SRIKANTH KOLARI/ACTIONAID

1.3 Enlarging the focus with resilience

As highlighted, DRR and climate change adaptation approaches focus on natural hazards and weather-related events. They both promote rather 'siloed' responses that work best in simple contexts where communities face one particular natural hazard or climate change stress at a time. They also tend to concentrate on disaster preparedness and livelihood adaptation.

However, in today's world, we see that communities and individual households often face several shocks and stresses at the same time – and these are not just natural hazards – that can keep them in an almost permanent crisis. The resilience concept is a response to the increasingly complex realities that poor and vulnerable people find themselves facing today. Resilience enlarges the focus from purely natural and human-induced climate-related hazards to include other 'man-made' shocks and stresses, for example those related to conflict, violence, environmental and natural resource degradation, epidemics, economic crises or food price increases. Resilience promotes a holistic analysis of the different risks communities are facing, encouraging an integrated approach whereby programmes related to, for example, DRR, climate change adaptation, governance, livelihoods, land rights or education, work together to build the resilience of communities over the long term.

Resilience thinking is also increasingly coupled with principles from the concept of 'transformation'. Transformation emphasises the importance of power and power relations in any efforts to address the underlying causes of people's vulnerability in disaster situations. **Transformative resilience** goes beyond the individual and aims to change power relations in a society between men and women, rich and poor, young and old, oppressor and oppressed. It challenges the status quo maintained and protected by dominant groups, with the ultimate aim of reducing vulnerability by establishing a fundamentally different structure and/or system of power.³

Shifting deep-rooted relations in this way requires institutional reform, behavioural shifts and cultural value changes across a society, alongside technological innovations. It involves the questioning of values, challenging of assumptions and a capacity to closely examine beliefs.⁴ Only by being this ambitious can we really transform the lives of the most poor and vulnerable and increase their resilience to disasters and conflicts.



In Vietnam, ActionAid has been training community rescue teams in search and rescue and first aid to ensure rapid response in case of floods.
PHOTO: HARRY FREELAND/ACTIONAID

1.4 Absorptive, adaptive versus transformative capacity

ActionAid's **working definition of resilience** brings three elements together: absorptive, adaptive and transformative capacities. It reads as *"the ability of people to recognise, challenge and transform the unjust and unequal power relations that dictate their vulnerability, to adapt positively to changing circumstances, and to mitigate, prepare for and rapidly recover from shocks and stresses such that their wellbeing and enjoyment of human rights is safeguarded"*.

Absorptive capacity is the ability to prevent, prepare for or mitigate the effects of negative events, through coping mechanisms that focus on essential basic structures and functions. Examples of absorptive capacity include early sell-off of livestock during droughts, building barriers to prevent floodwater reaching houses or farmland, stockpiling water and food ahead of elections that might result in violence, or equipping schools with fire extinguishers. It is to be noted that certain aspects of absorptive capacity, such as selling of assets required to sustain livelihoods or eating insufficient food, are very much a last resort and not part of ActionAid's concept of resilience.

Adaptive capacity is the next step on from absorptive capacity, bringing about longer-term change. Examples of adaptive capacity include diversification of livelihoods, adopting flood-resistant farming techniques, training community elders and local authorities on resolving tensions and conflict within and between communities regarding access to water or land, or adapting curriculums for health professionals to train them in how to deal with outbreaks of epidemics.

Transformative capacity is required when the change needed goes beyond people's absorptive and adaptive abilities, and when there is recognition that ecological, economic or social structures keep people trapped in a vicious circle of poverty and disasters and make the existing system unsustainable. This is when transformational change has to take place. This is about an ability to create a fundamentally new system with alterations in the primary structure and function of individuals, communities and systems.

Transformative capacity pushes for institutional reforms, cultural changes and behavioural shifts by questioning values and assumptions, and having the capacity to address fixed beliefs and stereotypes. This is fundamentally about challenging the status quo by addressing power relations.⁵ Examples of transformative capacity include adoption and implementation of environmental conservation policies, introducing quotas of women in decision-making bodies, establishing a dialogue between opposing groups or communities that are in conflict with each other, or introducing legislation in favour of women's land ownership.

BOX 2: 'Resilience lens'

Integrated programming is key to help build the resilience of communities. We need to be much more systematic in analysing how ActionAid's current programmes on governance, education, women's rights, sustainable agriculture and natural resources are linked and designed, so they can all contribute to building resilience. By applying a so-called 'resilience lens' to all our programming we can identify how we are already building resilience and how we can strengthen our focus and efforts to develop a coherent strategy to better support vulnerable people and communities. This means that we would have to apply this 'resilience lens' during our initial analysis and programme design. By using participatory approaches, women and men should be asked to reflect on the different shocks and stresses they experience, jointly investigate the direct and root causes of their vulnerability to these events, and explore how the proposed programme interventions can be responsive to these realities and contribute to people's resilience.

For ActionAid, addressing power relations is not unfamiliar territory. It has, in fact, been core to our strategies since the 1990s. As part of our HRBA, ActionAid campaigns for the promotion of the rights of women and other underrepresented groups, raises awareness, runs campaigns to address certain social attitudes and oppression that result in social and political exclusion, and empowers women to take leadership in disaster preparedness and response.

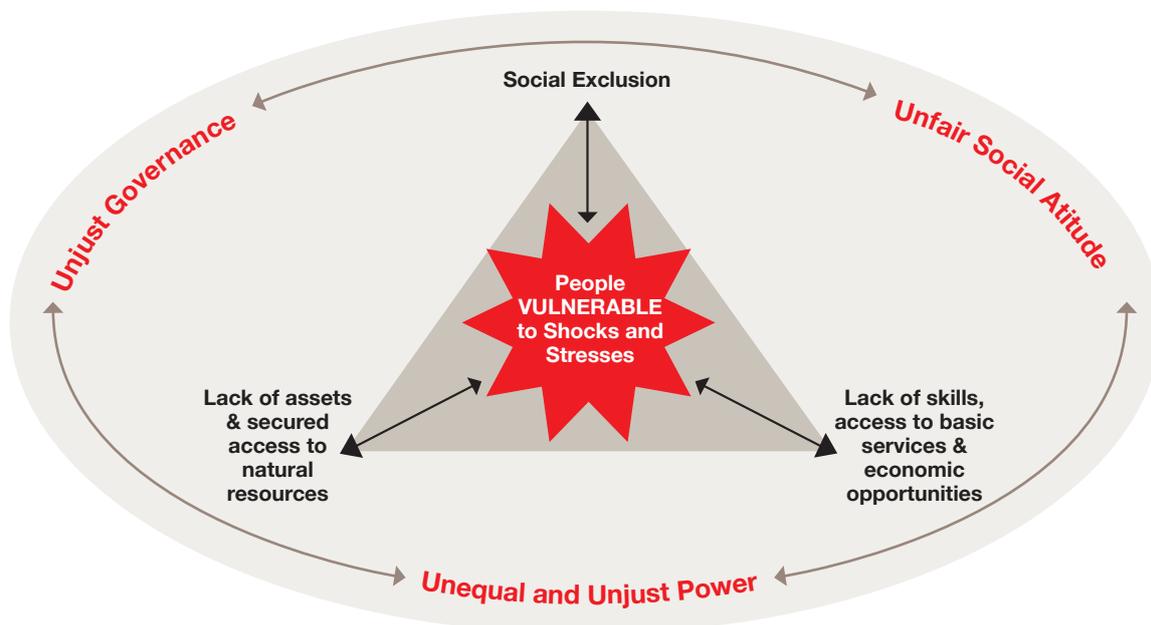
Such strategies aim to positively change the layout of society's social structure, which will in turn address some of the underlying causes of people's vulnerabilities to shocks and stresses. ActionAid staff do not, however, always link these kinds of strategies with building communities' resilience to disasters and conflict. It is pivotal that ActionAid staff develop this consciousness and start systematic analysis on how its larger HRBA programming can contribute more effectively to building communities' resilience to shocks and stresses by applying a 'resilience lens', and how to link it more clearly with strategies that build the absorptive, adaptive and transformative capacities of communities in times of disaster or conflict.



2. Vulnerability and inequality

When building resilience, we ultimately need to look at what makes people and communities vulnerable in the first place. In 2013, ActionAid completed a comprehensive analysis⁶ that laid bare the fact that people are not inherently vulnerable, but are made vulnerable by existing power relations, as well as cultural values/norms, structures and systems. The analysis identified three factors that tend to increase people's vulnerability to shocks and stresses.

- **Social exclusion** is an outcome of multiple human rights violations. In society, people face discrimination and the denial of rights on the basis of their gender, class, ethnicity, religion, race, caste, age or sexual orientation. This situation is often reinforced by policies and laws. All of this can lead to the marginalisation of certain groups and individuals in society, and women in particular often find themselves in an underprivileged position. This limits their participation and can exclude them from the economic, social and political life of their communities and societies, making them more vulnerable to the impact of disasters and conflict as their needs remain unmet.
- **Limited access to appropriate basic services** such as education, healthcare, information, finance, early warning services, evacuation, fair and stable markets, and entitlements such as social protection has a direct correlation with people's capacity to withstand shocks and stresses. This also directly links with people having difficulties in accessing and developing **appropriate skills** that could help them, for example, to save lives and to protect their houses.
- **Lack of assets** such as livestock or land, and **limited economic opportunities** to adopt sustainable and diversified livelihoods keeps people in impoverished conditions and increases their vulnerability. In such circumstances it will be very difficult to effectively prepare for and respond to disasters. Likewise, people living in poverty who **lack secure access to natural resources** such as land, forests, water and biodiversity have limited capacity to withstand the impact of shocks and stresses. Land-use change, dispossession, and the overexploitation of natural resources are responsible for further increasing their vulnerability.



Furthermore, as illustrated in the above diagram, ActionAid has seen in its work that the underlying causes of these factors arise primarily from **unequal and unjust power**, leading to **unjust governance** and **unfair social attitudes**, all of which mutually reinforce each other. The perpetrators of such unequal and unjust power range from family, patriarchal society and institutions, local to national government authorities, laws and policies, traditional institutions and local elites, to corporations, armed groups and international institutions.

Contexts differ between and within countries. Country programmes should therefore look to carry out their own in-depth analysis to identify and understand the vulnerability of different groups such as women, children, people living with disabilities and ethnic or religious minorities within their specific country context. This is especially important for an organisation such as ActionAid that focuses on working with the poorest and most excluded people.



In Vanuatu, ActionAid has trained women in emergency response and coordination. This woman is leading clean-up efforts after Cyclone Pam in 2015.

PHOTO: ACTIONAID

3. Human rights based approach (HRBA)

As already mentioned briefly in chapter one, HRBA guides all of ActionAid's efforts to end poverty and injustice.⁷ It is driven by the conviction that people living in poverty have the power within them to fulfil their human rights and create change for themselves, their families and communities. To help achieve this, ActionAid's programmes on the ground generally include an element of sensitising community members about their rights, and training on how to demand and claim these rights from local authorities to eventually transform power dynamics.

BOX 3: Reflection-Action

The Reflection-Action approach* provides an on-going democratic space for people to meet, discuss and explore issues relevant to them. By using participatory methods, the approach allows people to communicate their knowledge, experience and feelings without being restricted by literacy and language barriers. Methods include graphics such as calendars, matrices, maps and problem trees, and drama, storytelling and songs. In the process of raising people's awareness and understanding of issues affecting them, and developing their communication skills, ActionAid encourages them to engage in wider processes of development and social change.

*<http://www.reflect-action.org/what>

The Reflection-Action methodology is used most widely across ActionAid, but there are various other participatory methodologies that are used to raise this rights awareness among community members, to help them analyse their situation and the structural causes of the problems they are facing. In disaster-prone contexts this is complemented by participatory vulnerability analysis, a tool that involves communities, local authorities and other stakeholders to identify and examine areas of vulnerability. This enables and empowers communities to assess and understand their vulnerabilities and risks, and to participate in planning and implementing strategies to address them.



In Palestine, in the West Bank, villages lack basic services like health centres, roads and telecommunication networks. Through Women's 'Reflect' Circles, ActionAid raises the awareness of women on their rights and empowers them to discuss these issues in the larger community.

PHOTO: ACTIONAID

By empowering vulnerable groups and rights holders, helping them analyse existing power dynamics, and equipping them with the skills they need to demand action, ActionAid supports communities and individuals to understand their own real power vis-à-vis other stakeholders. By building local organisations of rights holders, and linking these organisations into networks, platforms, alliances and movements at the local, national and international levels, ActionAid helps build a broad and powerful movement for change.

ActionAid puts women and women's rights at the centre of all its HRBA work because women around the world are more likely to live in poverty, simply because they are women. Women's unequal position in society means they have less power, assets, or protection from violence, and often have limited access to education and healthcare. ActionAid believes that women are powerful forces for change, and empowers them to claim their rights as individuals and through collective action.

The theory of change underpinning HRBA has three interlocking components: empowerment, solidarity and campaigning.⁸ ActionAid regards these as important ingredients for tackling global poverty and social injustice. They have also been mobilised as part of ActionAid's resilience programmes.

Empowerment: empowerment is derived from 'power within', i.e. enhancing people's consciousness of the power structures they inhabit through processes of reflection and learning. In practice, this means that ActionAid supports people living in poverty to become active agents of change and to lead resilience building initiatives. We help them collectively identify the structural causes of their vulnerabilities that stem from a violation of their rights. Examples of ActionAid's empowerment-related activities are:

- Awareness raising about rights and entitlements, and ensuring the fulfilment of basic rights.
- Collective risk and vulnerability analysis using Reflection-Action and participatory vulnerability analysis methodologies, and supporting the development of community risk reduction and resilience plans that involve everyone within a community, including women and children.
- Leadership development, particularly of women, and supporting rights holders in establishing local organisations.
- Strengthening understanding and knowledge of good and sustainable practices around livelihoods, housing, early warning systems and first response skills such as first aid and search and rescue.
- Generating awareness around social protection measures (or lack of them) such as widows' pensions and women's revolving funds.
- Strengthening understanding and knowledge on the right to access and have control over natural resources such as land, water and forests.

Solidarity: solidarity relates to the concept of 'power with' by building alliances through solidarity programmes working with citizens, partners, organisations, networks, teacher unions, coalitions and alliances to create a wide support base that is sympathetic to the struggles of people who live in poverty and who are vulnerable to disasters and conflicts. Examples of ActionAid's solidarity-related activities are:

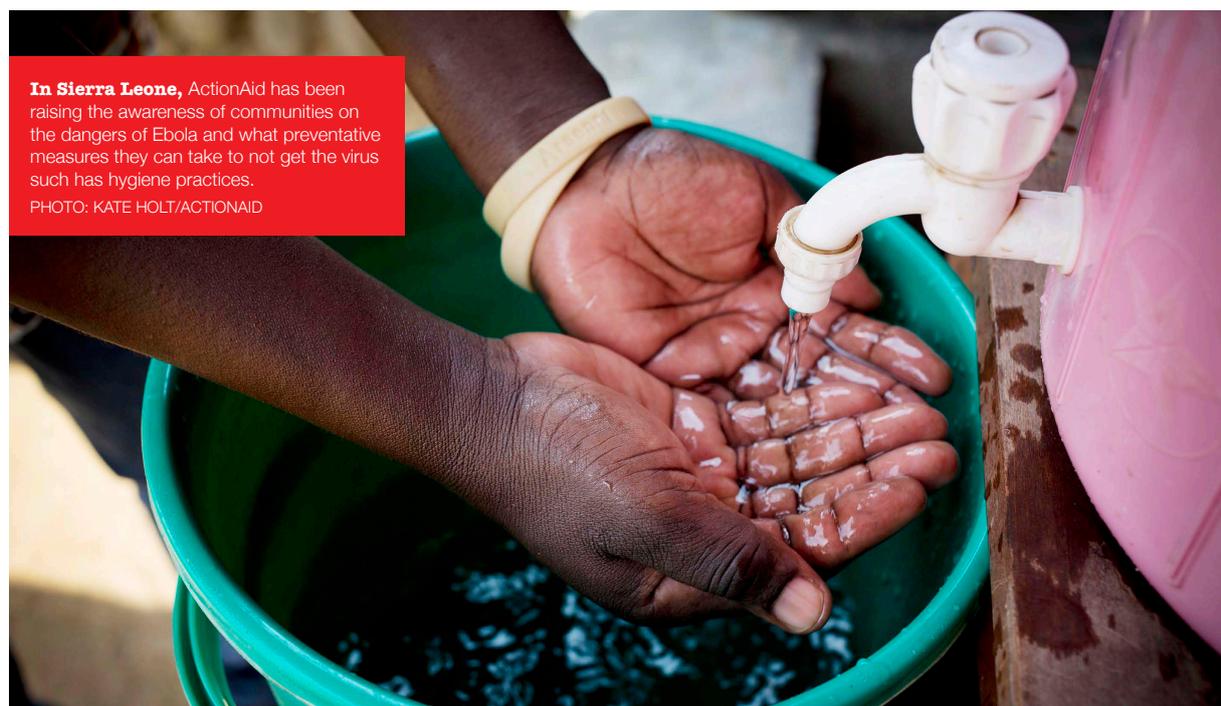
- Joining with other movements such as land rights, food security and education in advocacy work.
- Working with communities and civil society, in particular women's groups, to put pressure on decision-makers.

BOX 4: Women's resilience

Women's rights are a key focus area for ActionAid. We believe that ending poverty and injustice will only be possible when equality and rights are secured for all women and girls. Also in resilience programmes, ActionAid recognises the importance of working with women and girls. The Women's Resilience Index* that ActionAid developed in partnership with the Economist Intelligence Unit (2014) confirmed that women are disproportionately affected by any kind of disaster, and that violations of their rights increase significantly in the aftermath of disasters. Yet it reveals as well that women are strong leaders in preparing for and responding to disasters. ActionAid therefore supports them to take up this leadership role to lead their communities in their resilience building efforts.

*www.actionaid.org/womensresilience

- Establishing or linking with local clusters, networks and alliances to facilitate information exchange and mobilise others effectively around resilience.
- Working with other stakeholders to develop research and promote its dissemination on, for example, the impacts of disasters, climate change and conflicts on women.
- Encouraging partnerships between civil society, women, young people, academia and other formal groups.
- Mobilising women, young people, children, the wider public and development partners to create a wide support base.



Campaigning: campaigning relates to influencing policies and practices of decision-makers from the local to the international level. Through campaigning programmes, ActionAid aims to create and harness people's power to achieve social and political changes to the structural causes of poverty and, by extension, people's vulnerabilities. This increases people's 'power over' duty bearers. Campaigns are central to enhancing resilience, as they help in making different actors accountable and in bringing about long-term systemic change. Examples of ActionAid's campaign-related activities are:

- Mobilising women's groups to put pressure on local and national authorities for appropriate policies, adequate budgets and practices for emergency response and building their resilience.
- Putting pressure on duty bearers, both state and non-state entities (such as powerful individuals, corporations), to change their practices, policies and processes to respect the rights of vulnerable people, especially women. Examples include rights-based social protection schemes, earthquake proof building regulations, and capacity to ensure compliance with government regulations.
- Developing and strengthening forums/platforms on resilience.
- Promoting collective actions on issues arising from (joint) research and other evidence.
- Demanding accountability through, for example, participatory budget tracking or improved governance mechanisms.

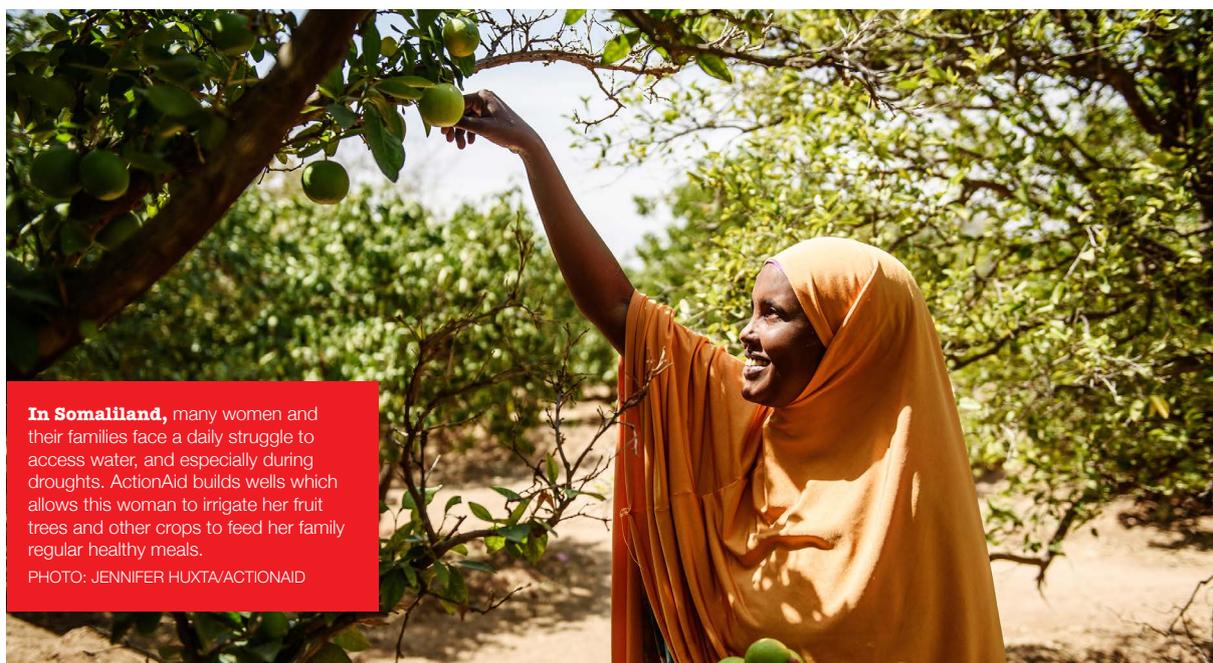
4. ActionAid's Resilience Framework

The previous chapter demonstrates that a resilience programme entails so much more than DRR and climate change adaptation approaches. It must also be about efforts to change power relations and dynamics, even if they do not seem to be important to disaster-or conflict-prone communities at first glance. It is important to mention this here explicitly, as there are many examples of DRR, climate change adaptation and peacebuilding programmes being rebranded as resilience programmes without strategies to work towards a transformation in power relations.

Although there are numerous examples of ActionAid's efforts to protect and fulfil human rights for poor people, and ultimately transform power relations through, for instance, governance, land rights, women's rights and education programmes, these efforts are not always recognised as contributing to the resilience of disaster and conflict prone communities.

By making these connections, applying a 'resilience lens' and carefully reviewing programmes in order to maximise their potential contributions to resilience building, ActionAid can increase its impact on the lives of people affected by shocks and stresses. These links also need to be established with ongoing DRR and climate change adaptation projects, alongside the organisation's climate change advocacy agenda.

ActionAid's humanitarian programme takes a long-term approach to recovery, working with communities over 2 – 3 years or more to enable them to recover. This approach offers the opportunity to contribute towards building the resilience of the communities the organisation works with. Emergency responses need to quickly meet basic needs but then go beyond this to build the capacity of communities to withstand and cope with future shocks. This means a focus on how we engage with communities and not just the provision of basic resources. Community capacity can be built on and strengthened from day one of the response, ensuring they are in a leadership role. Such strategies need to focus on building the resilience of affected communities to equip them with the knowledge, skills, resources and governance they need to mitigate or withstand future shocks and stresses.



In Somaliland, many women and their families face a daily struggle to access water, and especially during droughts. ActionAid builds wells which allows this woman to irrigate her fruit trees and other crops to feed her family regular healthy meals.

PHOTO: JENNIFER HUXTA/ACTIONAID

BOX 5: Resilience in humanitarian programming

Managing disaster risks has been on the global humanitarian agenda for many years. In fact, most DRR programmes continue to be financed with humanitarian funding. These DRR activities however tend to be stand-alone within the overall humanitarian response and recovery programmes. This is a reality for many organisations, including ActionAid. We need to review these programmes, especially during the recovery phase, with a 'resilience lens' and ask the question: are our activities supporting communities in 'building back better'? In other words, are activities contributing to the capacity of communities, and the structures and systems their capacities are defined by, to cope with future shocks and stresses and to continue to thrive? It is all about avoiding humanitarian programmes that simply replicate vulnerabilities, in order to prevent crises from recurring. For instance, there might be no point in helping pastoralists restock with the same breed of cows in an area that is expected to experience more frequent and prolonged droughts. It might be more effective to provide them with goats and camels instead, or train them to help diversify livelihoods.

Humanitarian responses can also go a step further towards building the resilience of communities, as the response to the tsunami in Aceh (2004) demonstrated. The tsunami happened at a time when the Indonesian government had stopped NGOs from operating in the area, which had suffered from almost 30 years of conflict. Following the devastating tsunami the government declared Aceh open to NGOs, and shortly afterwards declared that only peace would enable rebuilding after the disaster. NGOs got involved in building the capacity of government institutions, advancing gender equality and empowering civil society, a significant step towards finally bringing peace.* However, a word of caution must be added here, as not all humanitarian contexts allow humanitarian actors to enter political spaces given their neutral and impartial character. It might put their beneficiaries and staff at greater risk, or it might give legitimacy to groups that control the system. This is particularly the case in conflict situations.

*L. Fan (2013). *Disaster as Opportunity? Building Back Better in Aceh, Myanmar and Haiti*. HPG Working Paper. London, UK: Overseas Development Institute.

This chapter presents ActionAid's resilience framework that has been developed to strengthen our resilience programming. It encourages the development of integrated programmes that address the direct and underlying causes of communities' vulnerabilities to the multitude of shocks and stresses they are experiencing. The framework builds on an unpublished technical paper on resilience that ActionAid developed with the Overseas Development Institute.⁹

4.1 Elements of resilience

The resilience framework has different elements which are represented in the flower diagram on the next page. In the centre we see 'equal and just power'. This depicts the overarching aim of ActionAid's resilience work. A woman, her family and the community at large will only be able to be fully resilient (or to blossom - to put it in floral terms), when the power imbalances that keep people vulnerable are addressed. This can be achieved by working on four core interventions that are crucial areas to address the risks and vulnerabilities of disaster-prone communities. These interventions must be grounded in a holistic vulnerability and risk assessment and analysis. The four core interventions are:

- Realising human rights and access to basic services
- Gaining awareness, knowledge and skills
- Developing collective action and partnership
- Strengthening institutions and influencing policy

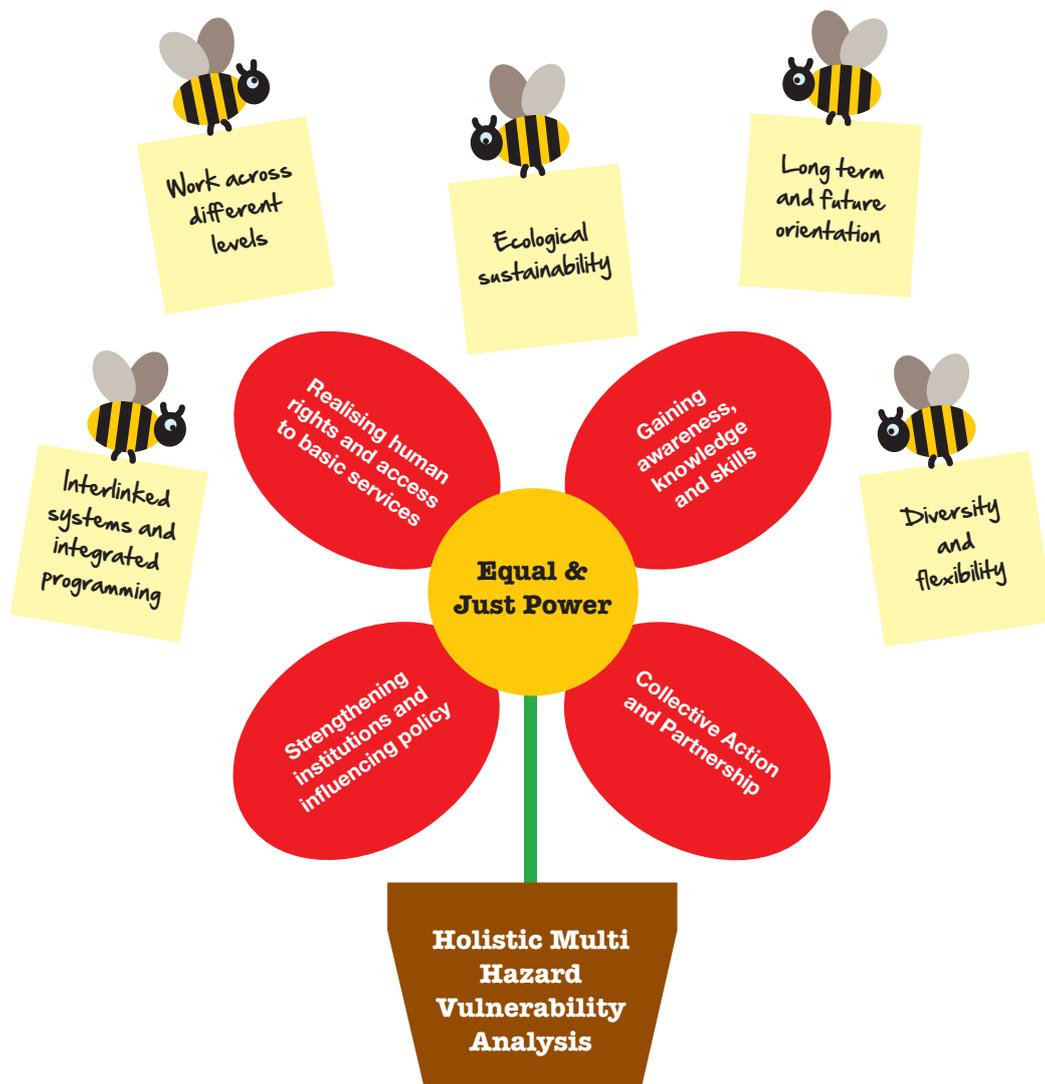
In the next sections, the different elements of the resilience framework will be further explained.

4.1.1 Achieving equal and just power

Addressing power relations is central to a resilience intervention becoming 'transformational', and ideally should result in shifting the balance of political and cultural power in society between men and women, and between other groups. Leadership can play a central role in resilience and transformation,¹⁰ and ActionAid especially believes in women's leadership. Leaders can challenge the status quo, provide alternative visions of what is possible, and take advantage of policy influencing opportunities to shift decision-making and resources to the local level.

Achieving a vision of resilience that addresses vulnerabilities means helping women and marginalised people gain more equal access to resources, skills, assets and power. It involves opposing unjust social attitudes, and building social assets such as community support networks. It is essential that participation in resilience interventions is meaningful to those involved. This involves collective, household or women-led risk and vulnerability analysis, as well as community meetings to agree on the most suitable activities to reduce risk and build resilience.

Diagram: ActionAid's human rights based approach to resilience¹¹



4.1.2 Conducting holistic vulnerability and risk analysis, and engaging with multiple risks

In order to build the resilience of a community, a holistic assessment and analysis of vulnerabilities and risks is required. This is depicted in the diagram by the pot that holds, or provides support to, the 'building resilience' flower. This involves consideration of all those risks likely to affect a given context, whether environmental, social, political or economic.

It is important to understand these risks from the individual and community perspectives, as well as through gender analysis, so that vulnerabilities and their underlying causes are identified. Furthermore, if we understand vulnerability as a lack of power to reduce the risk of a disaster or violent conflict from unfolding, then the essence of vulnerability analyses and participatory processes is about empowering people through an awareness process that leads to action, and eventually transformational change.

4.1.3 Key resilience interventions

In the diagram above, the flower petals signify the core areas of interventions/actions that are required to achieve equal and just power for all, and hence to foster resilience. These areas of interventions are briefly explained here.

Realising human rights and access to basic services

Resilience building cannot take place in the absence of achieving human rights for all, as vulnerability cannot be reduced without ensuring that its underlying drivers have been understood and eradicated. Initiatives to build resilience therefore must actively advance towards the fulfilment of human rights for the most marginalised people. Certain human rights are particularly important to resilience building, including the rights to:

- Life, liberty and personal security, including bodily integrity such as freedom from violence.
- Social security, including a social protection floor.
- Adequate living standards, safe housing and schools, food, water, livelihoods, and a decent environment.



In Cambodia, ActionAid's partner Ockenden has worked with communities to install water gauges that will help monitor water levels and the likelihood of floods.

PHOTO: PHILIP SEN/ACTIONAID

ActionAid, through its HRBA programme, stands with women, children and other underrepresented groups to realise their human rights, and to hold duty bearers to account to provide basic services such as clean water, education and early warning services. Where governments are not responsive, and especially in the aftermath of a disaster, ActionAid supports women to, for example, diversify their livelihoods and build disaster-safe houses.

Gaining awareness, knowledge and skills

Enhancing knowledge, reflection, learning and development of skills is a progressive step towards transformational resilience, which entails individuals and communities becoming aware of the 'power within' them to challenge inherited ways of thinking, assumptions and biases, as well as recognising and negotiating power structures. ActionAid works with women, children and their communities to raise their awareness about disaster risks and the power they themselves have to reduce these risks, but also to help them recognise the responsibilities of their governments in this respect. It is about linking them with the relevant authorities and institutions to provide them with information about, for example, evacuation routes or the nearest evacuation centres. ActionAid also builds their knowledge and skills in other ways, for instance, through diversifying livelihoods, accessing markets, natural resource management or civic voter's education to shun electoral or political violence

Building resilience is dependent on innovation. Resilience initiatives must include activities such as shared and peer-to-peer learning, knowledge exchanges and skills transfer that allow new ideas to be generated. Tapping into local knowledge and practices, and combining this with modern scientific knowledge, also helps to produce lasting context-specific solutions. It is also important that experimentation is encouraged, and that there is an acknowledgement that even though initiatives may not succeed, it is still possible to learn from them, as this can enhance future work.

Developing collective action and partnership

Resilience is most effectively built through initiatives that establish and strengthen community institutions, and that build collective action and partnerships across and between the local, district, national, regional and/or international levels. This is about organising and mobilising a group of people to work together (power with) to achieve long-term, deep-rooted social and political change. Examples include ActionAid's work with women's groups or cooperatives to establish, for example, women-led early warning systems, community compensation systems for households affected by disasters, or self-help groups that help women strengthen their livelihoods.

Strengthening institutions and influencing policy

In order to address the underlying causes of people's vulnerability to shocks and stresses, the policies and practices of both state and non-state institutions will have to be changed for the better in many countries. For example, policies that allocate an adequate budget for disaster risk reduction to local authorities can be very effective, and hence need to be promoted. However, this needs to be coupled with strong local authorities that will take the right decisions on how to spend these budgets wisely, and ensure that the most marginalised groups and individuals in the community will benefit. Therefore, resilience programmes must also focus on supporting local authorities that can enhance communities' ability to prepare for change.

This requires women and community groups, or civil society networks, to exercise power to create deep-rooted, long-lasting change through voicing demands for concrete action, strengthening governance structures, and increasing the accountability of institutions to address people's vulnerabilities to disaster. ActionAid provides extensive support to women's groups to, for example, influence the policy and budget of local authorities for gender-inclusive DRR strategies, or very specifically for the rehabilitation of river embankments, or to campaign against the approval of permits to polluting industries close to community settlements, or for action to provide protection to women and children in conflict. At the national and international level, ActionAid and its various networks are involved in campaigning and lobbying for climate justice.

4.1.4 Cross-cutting principles

Next to the four areas of intervention described above, there are five principles that need to be considered and ensured as part of any resilience-building programme. The bees in the resilience framework diagram illustrate these cross-cutting principles (or cross-pollination – to put in floral terms). These are:

Build ecological sustainability

Resilience building initiatives must acknowledge that human and ecological systems are highly interdependent. For instance, while it may make sense to build dykes and dams to protect communities from floods in the short term, if these are not built with careful consideration of ecological systems they can affect watersheds, destroy ecological buffers (such as mangroves), alter floodplain limits and have downstream impacts on other communities. All these could in turn enhance vulnerability in the future, creating exposure to a range of new risks. By applying, for example, ecologically sustainable forms of agriculture with efficient use of land, water and other natural resources, and zero or low levels of synthetic inputs, communities are likely to experience less conflict over resources, and they will be less exposed to price increases and volatility.

Enhance diversity and flexibility

Initiatives aiming to enhance resilience must provide and generate skills, knowledge, resources and assets to ensure that communities and systems have a diversity of options and choices when it comes to reducing the adverse impacts of shocks and stresses, or to taking advantage of new circumstances.

Essentially, this means that individuals, households, communities or systems (services, institutions, ecosystems and so on) are able to be flexible and can change the way they operate or function in response to shifts in the external context.¹² Practically speaking this could, for example, include households being able to resort to a portfolio of livelihood options that enable them to 'hedge' risks.

Work across different levels

Ensuring that resilience initiatives work across different levels is critical to success. Activities need to be initiated from individual, local and district levels up to the national, regional and international levels. There is wide consensus that tackling risk and reducing vulnerability requires interventions not only at the local level but also at higher levels of governance, as the power to effect change (for instance, in village communities) often lies with district authorities, and many drivers of risk and vulnerability are a result of national and international policies.

Interlinked systems and integrated programming

Resilience building requires an integrated approach. It requires holistic thinking about shocks and stresses coupled with governance, livelihoods and future uncertainty. This kind of analysis will reveal the underlying causes of risks and vulnerability, and affirm that resilience building initiatives need to touch upon and work together with political, social, economic and environmental systems and sectors. This is all about the integrated programming that has already been emphasised earlier in this paper. For example, education programmes that actively include DRR and climate change in the school curriculum will actively engage and mobilise schools to build a culture of safety, and involve parents and children in formulating plans for more resilient communities. Likewise, setting up SMS services that offer real-time livestock and/or crop prices increases smallholder farmers' access to information, helps them make decisions in their own best interests, and helps ensure they can build up enough assets to help them withstand unexpected shocks or stresses.

Take into account long-term and future orientation

Initiatives aimed at building resilience need to invest in long-term relationships with a wide spectrum of relevant actors, including collaborating with communities in the long term in order to be sustainable. These initiatives need to be flexible so that as new impacts, risks, hazards and disturbances appear, associated actions can be implemented accordingly.¹³ This is important when planning for the uncertainty of climate change and disasters, as well as unanticipated violence and epidemics. Resilience initiatives therefore need to consider different timescales, taking into account current, long-term and future needs.¹⁴ There may also be limits to resilience, for instance, in the case of residual climate impacts such as sea-level rises, ocean acidification or persistent drought. In these cases, alternative approaches may be required to address the irreversible loss and damage brought about by climate change.

In The Gambia, ActionAid train 'skill groups' so that women and their families can diversify their income through for instance soap making.

PHOTO: SYLVAIN CHERKAOUJ/
COSMOS/ACTIONAID



BOX 6: Action points for ActionAid to strengthen its work on resilience

The resilience agenda does not mean that ActionAid needs to alter its programming drastically. It is more about applying a 'resilience lens' to its HRBA programme, linking it with DRR and CRSA projects, 'resilience-proofing' humanitarian recovery programmes where local contexts allow, exploring ways to build resilience of conflict affected communities, and continuing to develop resilience projects to work with communities and groups that are most at risk of extreme shocks and stresses. Action points include:

- Build awareness of staff and partners on how HRBA programmes can contribute more effectively to building community resilience. Help them develop the skills they need to conduct holistic and multi hazard vulnerability assessments, and design programmes that build the transformative capacity of communities.
- Develop flagship resilience projects that combine activities to build the absorptive, adoptive and transformative capacities of communities, and demonstrate impact by piloting new methods to measure resilience.
- Ensure that DRR and CRSA projects reflect on the underlying causes of communities' vulnerabilities and risks they face, and include activities to challenge existing societal and government structures and power dynamics.
- Ensure humanitarian recovery programmes are contributing to communities' resilience to help reduce impacts of future shocks and stresses, and are supporting communities to prosper.
- Learn from HRBA programming in conflict-affected areas and explore the possibilities and limitations of building resilience of communities affected by conflict.

5. Concluding remarks: On a journey of resilience building

Resilience building remains a widely debated area of work, with many organisations and donors struggling to operationalise it and measure its impact. There are questions around what resilience entails, and whether it should 'sit' in or between the development and humanitarian fields of work. However, these debates are much less relevant when we take a community perspective.

When, for example, considering a community in Nepal affected by the 2015 earthquake, resilience to them means quick recovery whilst also ensuring measures are taken at household, community and government level to prevent future earthquakes from causing devastation and deconstruction. It is also about adapting their assets and livelihoods in such a way that future events such as floods and other climate extremes will not affect them. To achieve all of this, communities would need to be involved in all levels of decision-making, and be treated as powerful stakeholders and partners by governments and others.

ActionAid's resilience building framework has been developed to help understand the vulnerabilities of communities to different risks, and the opportunities that can be derived from this. It helps to design programmes that build the absorptive, adaptive and transformative capacities of communities. It is also solidly anchored in ActionAid's HRBA approach by identifying 'equal and just power' as the overarching aim of ActionAid's resilience work, and the three pillars of empowerment, solidarity and campaigning are reflected in the four core resilience interventions identified.

The framework opens up opportunities for ActionAid country offices around the world to work closely with women, children and other poor and marginalised groups to analyse their vulnerabilities to different shocks and stresses, take individual and collective action to address the direct and root causes of this, and with this ultimately shift the power dynamics that are keeping people vulnerable to the worst effects of conflict and disasters.



In India, ActionAid's partner NEADS has established a handloom facility like this to train women in traditional weaving and design, and give them access to the equipment to build a sustainable source of income.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID

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ActionAid is a global movement of people working together to achieve greater human rights for all and defeat poverty. We believe people in poverty have the power within them to create change for themselves, their families and communities. ActionAid is a catalyst for that change.

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